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ABSTRACT

Examined are changes in personality impressions formed by status-oriented individuals who differ in Need for Social Approval (NA) or Locus of Control of Reinforcement (I-E). Subjects recorded their initial and final personality impressions of speakers ascribed either high or low social status. High NA observers (or Externals) showed most positive changes in responding to low-status speakers. Low NA's were sensitive to high-status persons. Results extend Iverson's earlier findings and also definitional personality predictions. (Author)

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Changes in personality impressions formed by status-oriented individuals who differ in Need-for-Social Approval (NA) or Locus-of-Control-of-Reinforcement.*

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PROBLEM

The work of Iverson (and students) has shown that the variable of personality impressions (positive vs negative) is related to expected role-conformity behavior; that "immunity from unfavorable evaluation is accorded persons who display behavior which is congruent with their assigned role;" and that high status persons could maintain favorable ratings with deviant behavior in excess of that tolerated in low status individuals (Iverson, 1964, 1968; Iverson and Reuder, 1965).

These studies, however, contained certain informational "gaps." In their various experiments, the "observed status person" presented a communication which contained personal remarks directed either at the listener or the speaker's self, or else the speaker invited some kind of interpersonal action with the listener which was related to his role. No study was devoted to communication lacking in personalism. Further, error variances across the conditions of the various studies were not only very large, but also appeared to contain patterns which suggested changes possibly related to personality differences among observers.

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Research on and definitions of two personality variables, Need-for-Social Approval (NA, Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) and Locus-of-Control-of-Reinforcement (I-E, Rotter, 1966) strongly suggested possible interactive elements. These variables are unrelated to each other in terms of defining operations. However, there is considerable overlap in their verbal definitions of described personality characteristics and also in the kinds of relationships found with other variables. (Also see Lefcourt, 1976).

Crowne and Marlowe's studies generally tended to show that high NA subjects consistently responded so as to produce social sanction from others. Low NA Ss appeared to be relatively independent in their responses. Correspondingly, persons who attribute their personal successes to "all powerful others" could also well be expected to have higher need for social approval than those whose expectancies are based primarily on perception of personal achievement. Support for this view is found in work on I-E which has shown that externals are more strongly attracted to people whom they see as competent and independent than they are for people who lacked these traits (Silverman and Shrauger, 1971). Earlier work had shown that externals were more responsive than internals when both received a communication from a high prestige source (Ritchie, & Phares, 1969). Lefcourt (1976) also summarizes a variety of studies indicating that Externals are facilitated and internals impeded by the presence of "social stimuli," although he does not touch directly on the topic of quality of personality impressions.

The working hypothesis of the present studies was that persons ascribed high or low status respectively, although presenting the same impersonal communication, would be perceived differently in terms of the personality impression obtained by high or low NA subjects (and/or Externals vs Internals). On an a-priori basis, high NA observers and Externals were expected to change their personality ratings in a positive direction more than low NA observers or Internals, especially in responding to high status speakers. However, a reverse difference, namely, a more favorable reaction to low status speakers by high NA or External observers was also a tenable prediction, depending on the degree to which they attended to the social circumstances under which the speeches were presumably obtained.

The overall design of the two experiments contained two independent variables. The first was the "social status" (High or Low) ascribed to a stimulus person by the Experimenter. The second was type of score on a personality measure (either NA or IE) obtained on observers who made judgments about the stimulus person. These observer-subjects (either high or low on NA or IE depending upon the Experiment) initially all heard the same brief communication from a tape-recorded speech and were asked to give initial personality impression ratings. The Experimenter then ascribed high or low social status by providing a "more detailed" description of the speaker. The subjects then listened to the entire speech, after which they were requested to provide a second personality impression rating of the speaker. The dependent variable was the difference between initial and final ratings (i.e. "before" and "after" the ascription of status).

In Experiment I, subjects were 28 volunteer women recruited from the summer session. The speaker, an older woman, gave a tape-recorded speech dealing with the then-timely topic of relationships among poverty, race, health, illness and problems posed thereby. It was essentially a collection of cliches containing neither controversy nor suggested solutions.

In ascribed high status, Ss were told that the speaker was a prominent MD, professor of medicine and chairman of a professional conference at which this, her speech, had been recorded.

The ascribed low status orientation was that the speaker was one of many women who had been able to get away from a farm home, live in "Resurrection City," and whose speech was just one of several collected at gatherings where "anyone who wanted to" could speak. (The latter statement was intended to lift ordinary role constraints of a farm woman and lend credibility to her speech.)

Recruits were alternately given the NA scale either at the very beginning or end of the experiment with papers scored at the end of total data collection. Ss were then divided into high and low groups on a median cut.

S first listened to three relatively terse sentences from the tape. She was then asked to check the four most characteristic traits of the speaker on the Podell (1961) list of 31 trait words (for each of which Podell has established numerical "favorableness" weights). The taped speaker was then alternately ascribed either high or low status by the experimenter. After the completed speech, S made a second selection of the four "most characteristic" traits of the stimulus speaker. Changes in total score weights (as

established by Podell) from initial to final ratings constituted the dependent measure. Because this scoring method introduced an unforeseen tendency for restricted range of ratings (with all of the obvious inherent statistical problems) a different method of using the Podell scale was employed in Experiment II.

In Experiment II, the Subjects were 32 men and women nursing students. The I-E scale was substituted for the NA. The ten-minute speech was on "Why the Sky Looks Blue" by Sir James Jeans (1953). The male speaker had an Asiatic-French accent. As high status he was identified as an apprentice of Einstein who was describing a very sophisticated topic in terms that everyone could understand. For low status, he was described as a poor, simple gardner who worked for a wealthy Japanese family during World War II. Although educated by them, he was forbidden to leave the estate and was rescued by American soldiers at war's end. (Implicit in the rescue was removal of the speaker to an out-of-gardner role).

Personality impression ratings (initial and final) were made by having S rank-order (1 = favorable) all of Podell's 31 adjectives. Rank-sum changes for the five most and five least "Podell-favorable" adjectives were compared.

Results

The findings for both experiments were examined by means of anova and covariance--in each case with marginally significant, but nearly identical patterns of results. Practically all major mean difference changes were found in one and the same quadrant of the 2 by 2 design. Ratings of persons ascribed low social status which were made by observers themselves high in need for Social Approval (or high in Externality) appeared to account for most of the experimentally induced changes. The F-ratios for interaction were in the

range of $< .10 > .05$ for two-tailed tests. Despite repeated transformations, non-parametric analyses, etc. it was impossible to remove a constant and consistent impact of patterned heterogeneous error variance and heterogeneous initial-final correlations for the different conditions. Furthermore, as noted earlier, the rating scores in Experiment I were limited by the accidentally introduced fact of restriction-in-range.

With all of the procedural variations and statistical concerns, the most reliable, simple and comparable analyses of the results with regard to the experimental hypothesis were provided by t-tests for correlated measures comparing initial and final impression measures. Because in Experiment II, "summed rank" changes could have different meaning for positive than for negative words, separate comparisons were made.

Both the Need for Approval and Locus-of-Control variable showed similar patterns of relationships with the variable of status ascribed to the speaker--albeit with different degrees of statistical significance. As expected, all groups of subjects in both experiments showed more positive second ratings than first.

Low Need-Approval subjects showed more reliable change for target persons who were ascribed high status than for low-status targets (Table 1). Likewise, Internal subjects (who were expected to behave like Low NA's) also gave their highest ratings to persons ascribed high status (both positive and negative adjectives) (Tables 2 and 3) although these differences did not prove to be statistically reliable.

As already mentioned, findings for subjects High in Need for Social Approval (and Externals on Locus-of-Control) were the reverse, with the most significant changes clustered on the Low Status Speaker (Tables 1, 2, and 3). The pattern of initial-final correlations was similar for the conditions of Experiment I (Table 1-a) and for positive words in Experiment II (Table 2-a), but not for negative words (Table 3-a). A covariance analysis of these negative words (Table 4) removing initial levels from final ratings produced a marginally signficant I-E main effect ($p < .05$). However, the adjusted means (Table 5) show the same pattern of major change as the basic t-test analyses already noted.

A tangential finding--while not directly related to the experimental hypothesis--does have direct bearing on the methodology and thus warrants brief mention. Examination of the actual changes in rank given to the different words in Experiment II suggested that within a personality-impression-rating context, different words might have different appeal for different kinds of persons. Both positive and negative words were subjected to repeated measures anova. A comparison of the patterns of distribution of variance in Tables 6 and 7 clearly indicates that the positive and negative words were not reflecting the same relationships. The triple interaction among the experimental variables and the specific negative words, is especially interesting. Illustrated in Figure 1, it suggests the need for extreme caution in selecting the operation for obtaining impression-ratings. Iverson's metric (which yielded much more clean-cut results) was based on a large range of words (both in quality and quantity). It is possible that in our efforts to simplify the metric, we have introduced another extra dimension--"specific

implication of particular words for persons of different personality-type, under status-attribution conditions." It is certainly an area which needs further exploration and clarification.

Implications and Conclusions

The general tendency for all observer-subjects to change their impressions of any stimulus speaker in a positive direction, when the target persons behaved in well-meaning and role-congruent ways, is consistent with earlier reports by Iverson et al (1964, 1965, 1968). Consequently, it could be inferred that subjects in the present experiments perceived the speakers irrespective of their ascribed status to be acting in a credible manner and to be devoid of negative intention, if not positively motivated. Unsolicited comments from subjects themselves supported this contention.

In this context, the most notable finding was evidence for interaction effects between ascribed status of the stimulus persons and the personality characteristics of observers. Subjects classified as high in NA, or as Externals, displayed relatively more deference (greater positive change) in rating speakers with low achievement status than for those introduced as having superior status. In doing so, they were apparently looking beyond the mere ascription of a speaker as a farm woman or a gardner.

As introduced by the experimenter, these persons were speaking under conditions which freed them from normal role restrictions. In exercising this freedom, they were showing positive assertiveness and a speaking capability not to be otherwise expected in persons of such lowly background. As Jones and Davis (1965) have suggested, socially attuned observers are likely to employ more extreme ratings,

either positive or negative, when target persons are behaving atypically than when their behavior is commonplace. MD's and Einstein apprentices (the high status ascriptions) may also be accorded positive regard but it is not exceptional for them to give speeches (to say nothing of speeches of this level and type of content) whereas it is uncommon for "farm women" and "gardners" to do so. Thus, with the heightened social sensitivity of persons high in need for social approval and of Externals (who view the world as controlled by "all powerful others,") it seems plausible that they should, more so than other observers, exaggerate favorable personality evaluations of low status persons who are behaving legitimately but remarkably.

The relative failure of Internals Ss to differentiate high and low status personages when assigning personality ratings is also consistent with the definitional premise, namely, that they are inclined to be less focused on social cues than are Externals unless a social facet is stipulated as a component of achievement. (Lefcourt, 1976). While observers low in need for social approval did show a deferential change in impressions, they appeared to be more attentive to the speaker who was ascribed superior rather than to the ascribed low status speaker.

Such persons tend to be more "task-oriented" than persons high in such approval need. Their "ratings" task, therefore might well have been more guided by the authoritative labelling of the target person by the Experimenter than by the "extra" factors of social legitmacy and/or exceptionality bearing on the speaker's behavior. In essence, they viewed their ratings as an "accuracy-of-judgment" task with minimal social empathy or involvement.

Finally, the results lend support to a generalization that a positive and legitimate exercise of freedom from role constraints by an actor helps to compensate for being ascribed low status. Such self-presentation engenders favorable impressions especially in those observers who themselves are high in Need-for-Social Approval or who are External in locus-of-control-of-reinforcement. However, the secondary findings with respect to the nature of the rating metric require further study to enhance confidence in the reliability and scope of this generalization.

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Figure 1. Triple Interaction (from Table 6) of particular negative words and the experimental variables of Ascribed Status of target person and Cognitive Style (Internal or External) of the Observer. Ordinate = Mean Change Scores from Initial to Final ratings--adjusted so that a positive value indicates a change in favorable direction.